



United States Department of Agriculture

# IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

MAY 2014



## Natural Resources Conservation Service

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A Crawford County alfalfa field is protected from erosion with a terrace system.



## A Message from the: **State Conservationist**



*Jay Mar,*  
State Conservationist

### **Conservation Etched Upon the Landscape**

While on a road trip to relocate our son to western Montana, I noticed the many NRCS conservation practices and management systems across the states. Terraces, waterways and cover crops in Iowa; no-till seeding, living snow fences, pasture and windbreak plantings in South Dakota; grazing systems, water developments and irrigation water management in Wyoming; and forest stand improvement and stream bank restoration practices in Montana.

I couldn't help but smile, knowing the legacy of conservation planning and technical assistance that has transitioned America, and to have had a small part to a successful stewardship process.

Coincidentally during our travels, I received an email from a retired State Conservationist, who was on a road trip herself across the U.S., sending pictures of conservation from her stop in Iowa. She proudly titled them... "I see the hard work of our conservationists is etched upon the Iowa Landscape." It made me proud to be the State Conservationist for Iowa NRCS, and should make you feel proud that you are making an impact.

Content with progress in our conservation planning initiative and new opportunities offered by the new Farm Bill programs – including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs (ACEP) of Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) and Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) – I began thinking about the many possibilities of getting even more conservation on the land. It is good to be an NRCS conservationist!

## IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

**Current Developments is a product of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Des Moines, Iowa, published bimonthly by the Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Staff in cooperation with NRCS and partner agency employees from across the state.**

### **Current Developments Stories and Photos**

*Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell at [laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov).*

*Past issues can be found at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_008273](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008273)*



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## Cover Crops: Stand Out From the Air, Too

by Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist

Most of us are growing accustomed to seeing the dramatic green color of cover crops stand out among crop fields at times when most of the landscape is a shade of brown.

Since wide landscapes are almost always more dramatic from high above, I thought it might be interesting to see what cover crop fields looked like in the spring compared to surrounding fields with no cover crops.

Retired Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Specialist Lynn Betts took aerial pictures for us in Pocahontas and Guthrie Counties throughout April. The results were impressive, showing blankets of green cover in the midst of unprotected fields, and fields with limited amounts of residue.

From the air, you can see how cover crops provide the protection the land needs where gullies form on unprotected soils.

Iowa NRCS will use these images to further campaign for cover crops and other conservation practices that improve soil health through our "Unlock the Secrets in the Soil" campaign.

Check out our new webpage dedicated to soil health resources: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ia/soils/health/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ia/soils/health/).

Photos by Lynn Betts



Guthrie County (near Stuart)



Pocahontas County



Guthrie County (near Bayard)

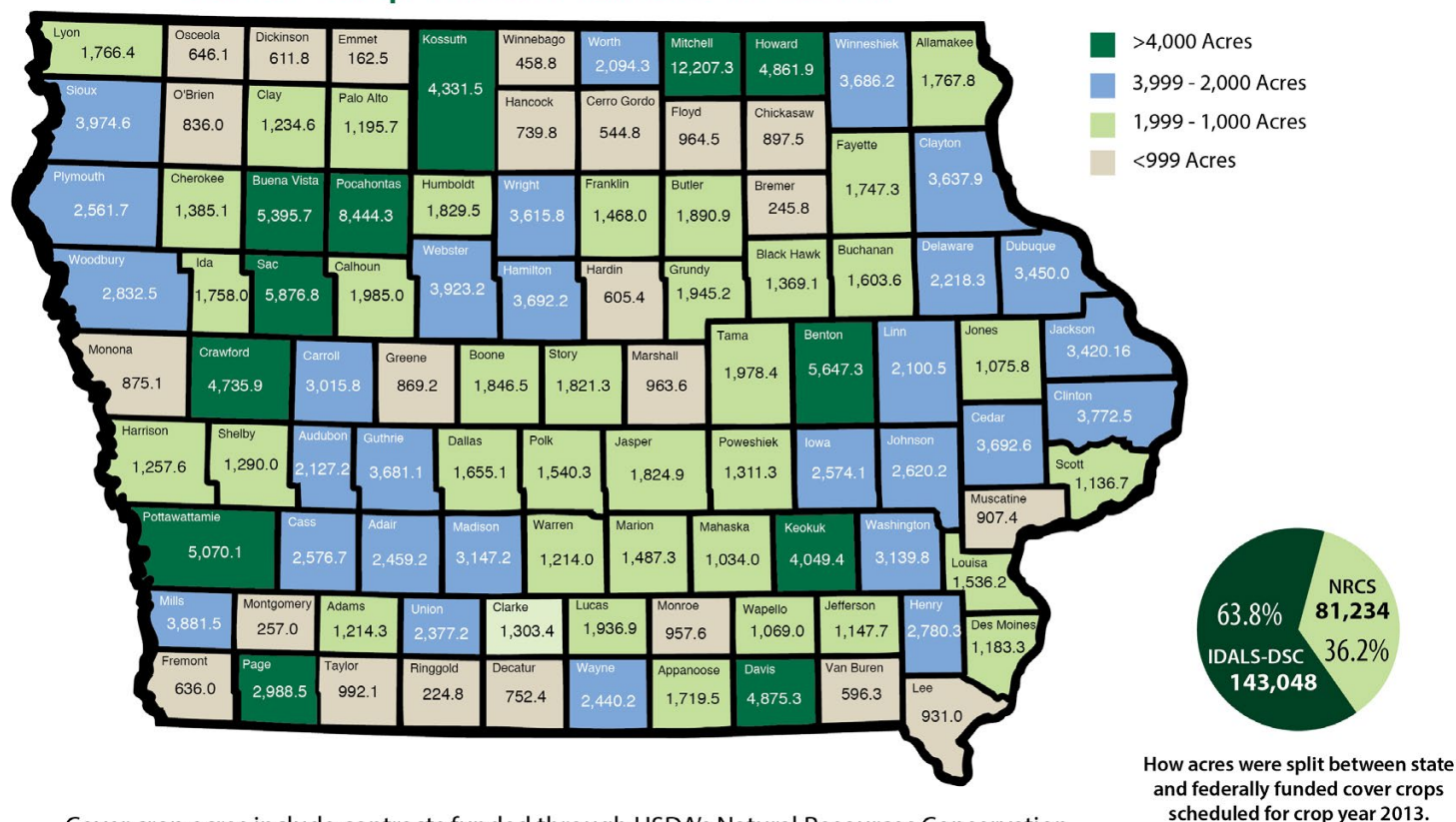


The total includes prevented planting acres due to spring flooding. Without a cash crop, these producers planted cover crops to keep their soils covered throughout the growing season, and oftentimes through the entire fall and winter months.



# Iowa Cover Crops

## Cover Crop Acres Planted in 2013



Cover crop acres include contracts funded through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (Environmental Quality Incentives Program/Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program) and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation (Clean Water Initiative). Prevented planting acres are also included.

## The Philippines: A Soil Conservationist's View

*Submitted by Greg Townley, NRCS District Conservationist, Malcom Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Special Emphasis Program Manager (SEPM)*

Doug Ruopp, soil conservationist in the Malcom NRCS field office, visited the Philippines in August of 2013. Doug's fiancé, Leigh Ann, worked there for 8 weeks to train Philippine workers to do some of the work that her company has outsourced overseas to reduce costs. Doug left the corn fields of Iowa to visit Leigh Ann on the Philippine islands of Cebu, Bohol, and Negros Oriental.

The Republic of the Philippines is a sovereign island country in South-east Asia situated in the western Pacific Ocean. Therefore, people from the Philippines are part of the USDA Special Emphasis Program Area of AAPI (Asian American/Pacific Islanders). As of 2007, there was an estimated 3.1 million people of Filipino ancestry living in the United States. The NRCS is always looking for opportunities to recruit some of these people who have U.S. citizenship into the NRCS work force.

Doug may not have had a chance to recruit while there, but he certainly had the opportunity to learn more about their culture. He observed that small scale agriculture mostly consisted of families who had about ½ acre and would have a few goats, a water buffalo (for pulling tillage equipment), and some chickens. Large scale agriculture consisted of rice fields and corn fields. Doug noted that

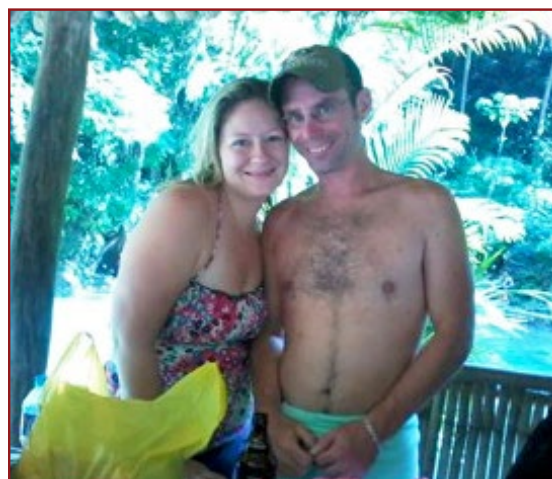
the corn looked very poor compared to the corn grown in the rich soils of Iowa. He also said that there were many types of fruit grown in the Philippines, and he especially liked the mangos.

They visited open markets with all types of fruit and fish. Pork is also available at many markets and restaurants. They enjoyed eating pork as part of a whole cooked hog where the market workers cut off pieces of meat with a machete. Doug said the Filipinos used all parts of the animal. He and Leigh Ann tried chicken intestines on a stick (they were not impressed) and deep fried pork knuckle (tasted good).

There was a lot of traffic on the roads they travelled. There seemed to be confusion and lack of rules, but he did not see any accidents. They mostly rode in taxi's, which were vans. He observed a lot of bicycles, motorcycles and motorcycle taxis. There was plenty of honking and lots of fast activity, but their transportation system seemed to work for them.

Doug and Leigh Ann enjoyed swimming and snorkeling in the clear waters. The most memorable part was swimming with a whale-shark the size of a school bus.

Living conditions were poor in many of the areas that Doug and Leigh Ann visited. The Philippines was the second wealthiest coun-



*Leigh Ann and Doug Ruopp enjoy the beauty of the Philippines.*

try in East Asia after World War II. However, their economic condition deteriorated in the 1960s. Their economy has been on the rebound since the turn of the century, but 45% of the population still has a daily income of less than \$2 in 2013. The best opportunity for growth in the Philippines now is tourism and business process outsourcing.

Doug and Leigh Ann enjoyed learning about the Philippines and experiencing its beauty.

On March 22, 2014, Doug and Leigh Ann married. Maybe there will be another learning opportunity for the Ruopp's to share with NRCS employees about their travel in the future to a different part of the world.



## Intern: Making the Most of Opportunity

*Submitted by Teresa Steffens, Administrative Management Assistant, West Union*

A summer intern for the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation turned his 2013 experience into an Iowa State University senior project for he and two of his classmates.

Ethan Thies worked with the Howard County Soil and Water Conservation District in the summer of 2013. Thies expanded on that experience to assist Howard County farmers Charlie and Mark Reis with their planned ag waste

system for the family dairy operation.

Thies and two of his classmates helped the Reis family size pumps for their ag waste pits and to develop a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) for the dairy operation.

The Reis family is working with Silver Creek Project Coordinator Neil Shaffer on the installation of the manure system.



*Pictured: (left to right) Mark Reis, Ethan Thies, Chris Heilskov, Neil Leichti, and Charlie Reis.*

The students logged about 120 Earth Team volunteer hours for the project.

## Jon Matz: Starring in Future Episode of 'This American Land'

Muscatine County District Conservationist Jon Matz will be featured in an upcoming episode of "This American Land," a conservation-themed news magazine program that airs on public television stations nationwide.

"This American Land" producers approached NRCS about highlighting the ways farmers are protecting the Mississippi River Basin. Matz offered Blue Grass, Iowa, farmer David Petersen, who runs a small dairy operation and grows corn and soybeans on several hundred acres.

Matz served an integral role, talking on camera and helping to direct producers during the 10-hour shoot on a cold, blustery day in late April.

Justin Fritscher, a public affairs specialist with NRCS in Washington D.C., worked with Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson to assist in the production, as well. Fritscher says the exact days and times "This American Land" will air is still pending.

He says the show will also feature two Illinois farmers, one with a hog operation and the other a

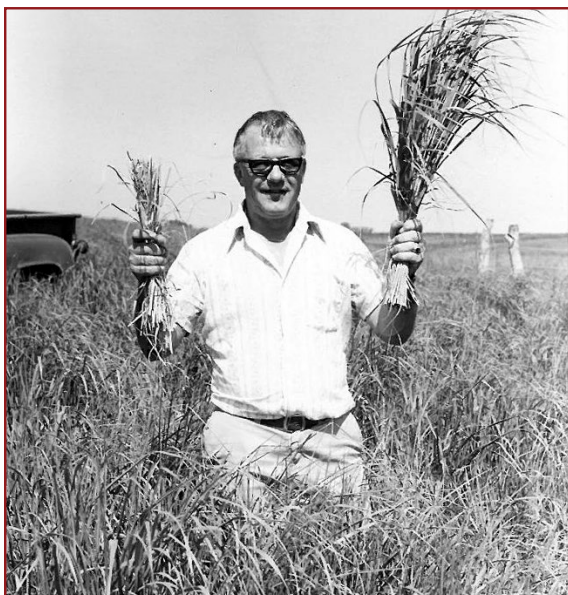


*Muscatine County District Conservationist Jon Matz prepares to talk on camera about a grassed waterway and filter strip that are filtering out potential runoff from David Petersen's dairy farm.*

more traditional row crop farmer. During a typical 30-minute episode, each producer will be featured for about 7-8 minutes.

"This American Land" featured other NRCS projects last fall. To view past episodes, visit: [www.thisamericanland.org](http://www.thisamericanland.org).

## Back In the Day



This edition of "Back in the Day" features a couple pictures from the 1970s in southern Iowa.

At left, former Ringgold County Soil Conservationist Bob Loudon illustrates the "take half-leave half" principal of grazing switchgrass. This photo was taken by Lynn



Betts in July 1974, 12 miles south of Creston.

At right, contract employees lay sod and jute mesh for the Lake Miami Erosion Control Project. This photo was taken by former Monroe County District Conservationist Roger Hansen in September 1971

near Albia.

If you have a "Back in the Day" picture you would like to contribute, please mail it to Jason Johnson or Laura Crowell in the state office, or scan and e-mail a high resolution version to [laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov).

### HR Corner

#### And Justice For All – More Than Just a Poster!

As Federal Employees, we pass by this poster which proclaims there is JUSTICE FOR ALL. Taking the time to read and understand the poster is important to us and the customers we serve.

It states that the USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, status as a parent, because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or retaliation. It also provides the reader with the process for filing a complaint alleging discrimination. It is available at: And Justice for All Poster.

To ensure a work environment free from discrimination, NRCS's employees are required to bring all potential issues of discriminatory behavior, real or perceived, to the attention of their supervisor or to Adam Stiegelmeier, ASTC-Management, to protect the employee/customer and the NRCS.

Departmental Regulation, 4070-735-001, Employee Responsibilities and Conduct, is available in full text at the following site: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/DR4070-735-001.htm>. It states that every employee is required to report actions by other employees that they know, or have a reasonable basis to believe, are violations of law or regulation, including sexual harassment.



## Employee Spotlight: Aaron Eggert



**Position:** Aaron Eggert has been a soil conservationist in the Sigourney Field Office since January 2014.

**Background:** Eggert grew up in Colfax and graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in Environmental Science.

In college, Eggert worked in the analytical chemistry lab at the National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment. Following graduation, he worked as a biological science technician assisting in research of soil organic matter content under various land management practices.

He worked for DuPont Pioneer in the Ag Traits department before coming to NRCS.

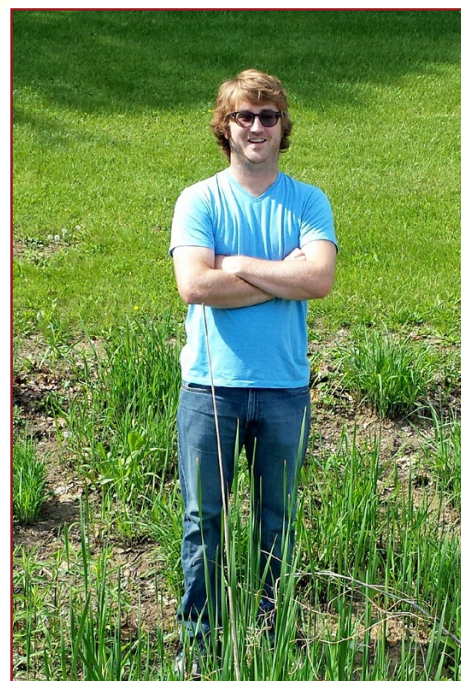
**Day-to-Day:** Eggert wanted to work for NRCS since college. "I

wanted a career where I could apply my education the most," he says. "It's also nice to have a hand in helping not only rural communities, but also cities and the environment when it comes to soil and water quality issues."

"I enjoy the variety of our work - from being in the office to being in the field," he says.

**Long-Term:** Eggert says that with the variety of career opportunities with NRCS, his goal is to find an area where he can grow and utilize his education and experience best.

**Hobbies:** Eggert enjoys running, cycling, fishing, gardening, music and spending time with his girlfriend and their dog.



Aaron Eggert

## SAVE THE DATE

Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament  
Friday, Aug. 22, 9 a.m.  
Veenker Memorial Golf Course  
Ames, Iowa

For questions, contact:  
Jason Johnson at  
515-323-2701 or  
[jason.r.johnson@ia.usda.gov](mailto:jason.r.johnson@ia.usda.gov).



**WATER FESTIVAL:** GIS Specialist Jim Phillips spoke with nearly 100 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from across Iowa during the Iowa Children's Water Festival at Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny on May 15. Phillips and Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson presented information on how healthy soil helps improve water quality.



## Spotlight Video:

### Don't Treat It Like Dirt



It was several years in the making, but Dallas County District Conservationist Brad Harrison's vision came to reality this spring.

Harrison recently collaborated with friends and colleagues (and in some cases, made friends) to produce the music video, "Don't Treat It Like Dirt," a project he worked on for several years. The video hit YouTube in early May, and already has more than 2,000 views.

The idea for the project began with Harrison penning words to a song, but from there it didn't move along as quickly as he would have liked. "We talked to several groups of students from several different schools," he said. "For one reason or another, it just never got done.

"I wanted younger people to sing the song because I wanted it to be fun and lighthearted. It's really meant for a younger audience."

Harrison finally found his vocal group at Panorama High school in Panorama, with the trio of Nathan Block, Annie Kemble and Allison Meinecke.

Once he found his singers, where would Harrison find someone to record a catchy tune to match the words? And, where would it be recorded?

That's where fortunes start to turn for Harrison. He found local producer Melissa Stukenholtz who runs Sound Farm Studio on a farm near Jamaica, along the Guthrie-Dallas County line. Artists, like Slipknot, have recorded at The Sound Farm, so it could be cost prohibitive, right?

Wrong. The generous Stukenholtz - feeling strongly about the project - donated the studio time for the project. And, that's not all she did. She also passed Harrison's lyrics on to her friend and musician, Antone Disterhaupt in Sioux City, who promptly put a tuned together.

In late March, the trio from Panorama gathered with Stukenholtz and Sound Engineer Ryan Martin to lay down the vocals with the music at the Sound Farm.



*When recording was complete, it was time to exhale and celebrate. From left to right: Ryan Martin, sound engineer; Allison Kemble, Allison Meinecke and Nathan Block, Panorama singers; and Brad Harrison, NRCS district conservationist.*

After just a couple hours, the song was recorded.

Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson took photos and shot video of the recording process. "My vision was to have a video that featured a combination of the kids singing and having fun with still images of the good and bad things they sing about in the song," said Harrison.

Iowa NRCS State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell edited and produced the video with Harrison's assistance. Crowell then promoted the video through a Twitter campaign, resulting in views by people in more than 40 countries.

"I'm pretty happy with how it turned out," said Harrison. "I can't believe all the attention it's getting."

Harrison is no stranger to creative visions. The NRCS slogan, "Helping People Help the Land," came from Harrison himself several years ago.

And more recently, another Harrison project became reality with the WhoBuddies Adventure series of comic books. He has worked with Crowell and a California artist to produce three short stories about conserving natural resources.

What's up next for Harrison? We'll just have to see!

## Changes In: Iowa NRCS Personnel

### *In order of Effective Date*

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Tenold Moretz, Brenda	Natural Resource Specialist	Reassignment	3/9/14	Garner
Hawks, Josh	Soil Conservation Technician	Reassignment	3/9/14	Sac City
Carper, Ronda	Civil Engineer	Resignation	3/22/14	Area 2 Engineering
Bucklin, John	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	3/23/14	West Union Area Office
Guffey, Dora	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	3/23/14	Fort Dodge Area Office
Overton, Russell	Civil Engineering Technician	Reassignment	3/23/14	Area 3 Engineering
Leer, Regina	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	4/19/14	Williamsburg
Adkins, Marty	Acting Asst. State Conservationist (Special Projects)	Detail Not to Exceed 90 Days	4/20/14	Des Moines State Office
Drechsel, Matt	Acting State Resource Conservationist	Detail Not to Exceed 90 Days	4/20/14	Des Moines State Office
Schulte, Denis	Acting Asst. State Conservationist (Field Operations)	Detail Not to Exceed 90 Days	4/20/14	West Union Area Office
Baker, Doug	Area Agricultural Engineer	New Position	4/20/14	Thibodaux, La.
Osborn, Christian	Acting Agricultural Engineer	Detail Not to Exceed 90 Days	4/20/14	Fort Dodge Area Office
Hardeman, Carol	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	5/3/14	Oskaloosa
Carter, David	Soil Conservationist	Resignation	5/4/14	Sidney
Wickman, Stacy	Resource Conservationist	Detail Not to Exceed 90 Days	5/12/14	Des Moines State Office
Miller, Denise	Office Assistant	Resignation	5/16/14	Area 4 Programs

## Changes In: IDALS-Division of Soil Conservation Personnel

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Ackley, Carla	Secretary	New Hire	3/14/14	Bedford
Hoelker, Charles	Soil Technician	Retirement	3/27/14	LeMars
Van Den Huevel, Lacey	Secretary	New Hire	4/25/14	Oskaloosa
Starkey, Ryan	State Minerals Inspector	New Hire	5/23/14	Des Moines